Investigation of the job demands-resources model in increasing quality of life factors within the retail industry: Thesis proposal

Recently, in the wake of the recession, the workforce is faltering and people are finding increased workloads and the additional stress that inevitably follows. Following positive psychology, scholars are pursuing a general trend in work and organizational psychology that is interested in optimizing employees’ functioning and positive work experiences (Luthans 2002), as well as identifying and managing their strongest qualities (Seligman & Csikszentimihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is a movement that promotes emphasis on focusing on the strengths rather than the weaknesses of people, is interested in resilience rather than vulnerability, and is concerned with enhancing wellness, and prosperity of the good life (Diener, 2000; Peterson, 2000; Snyder, 2000). It seems important that overall satisfaction with one’s life is inexplicably tied to several facets of life, not the least of which is effective work performance (Wright & Staw, 1999).

In the organizational behavior field, extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between positive feelings of employees and their performance, with much attention being paid to the constructs of positive reinforcement, social support, employee relationships and even humor (Luthans, 2002; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 2004). Models such as the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) explore both negative and positive characteristics of work experiences to glean further knowledge of employees optimal functioning (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, & Lens, 2008). The purpose of this study is to determine how positive job characteristics are related to work outcomes and ultimately how these outcomes are related to satisfaction with general quality of life through the use of the Job Demands-Resources model.

**Job Demands-Resources Model**

The JD-R model proposes that work outcomes can be categorized into two broad categories, job demands and job resources that are differentially related to specific outcomes (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Scheufeli, 2001). This model focuses on the aspects of the job that affect burnout through the characteristics of job demands, or aspects of work that tax employees’ personal capacities (e.g. psychological/physiological costs) (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003).

The JD-R model also looks at the positive effects of job resources that enhance employees’ well-being. Job resources are defined as those physical, physiological, social, or organizational aspects of work that can reduce the health-impairing impact of job demands, are functional in achieving work goals, and stimulate personal growth, development and learning (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The presence of job demands and the absence of job resources associate positively with employees’ burnout through an energetic process, which suggests that job demands wear out employees’ energy, resulting in the adoption of a cynical attitude towards their work. Conversely, job resources are associated positively with employees’ engagement through a motivational process either directly or by stimulating goal accomplishment and enhancing feelings of self-efficacy (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

This study, using the framework of the JD-R model, will research positive job characteristics such as social support and experienced fun in the workplace that are associated with an increase in positive work outcomes, (i.e. increased job satisfaction and decreased job tension), which in turn positively impact general quality of life outcomes like life stress and self-worth.

Job Characteristics Work Outcomes Quality of Life Outcomes

Job satisfaction &

Decreased job tension

Decreased life stress &

Increased self-worth

Social support &

Workplace fun

**Social Support**

Social support is a work characteristic that has been defined as the actions of others that are helpful or intended to be helpful (Deelstra et al, 2003). It includes a variety of interpersonal behaviors that enhance individuals’ psychological or behavioral functioning. There is an abundance of evidence suggesting that social support is a positive predictor of job satisfaction (Harris et al, 2001), as well as other positive outcomes (Harris, Moritzen, Robitschek, Imhoff, & Lynch, 2001). Collegialsocial support takes the form of sharing friendships, personal problems, and confidences with other individuals in the workplace. Bahnuick et al. (1990) found that among business managers, instrumental support from colleagues and mentoring predicted higher levels of job satisfaction, as well as higher levels of perceived success.

Luthan’s (2002) work in positive organizational behavior has recently been focused on the pursuit of employee happiness and health as viable goals of organizational psychology. The quality of employees’ working environment has delved into personal and organizational resources at work that facilitate the flow at work. To be more specific, the flow experience describes feelings of intense involvement in an activity and the intrinsic interest to continue to perform the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Walen, 1993). This intrinsic motivation to perform activities leads employees to remain continuously interested in their work. Organizational resources, such as social support, high levels of autonomy, and feedback were more likely to increase the experience of flow at work among high school music teachers (Bakker, 2005). These resources have motivating potential because they make employees’ work meaningful, hold them responsible for work outcomes, and provide them with information about the results of their work activities (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003).

**Workplace Fun**

Experienced fun is defined as the extent to which a person perceives the existence of fun in the workplace (Peluchette & Karl, 2005). Studies suggest that when people have fun doing their jobs they are more energized and motivated, get along better together, provide better customer service, experience less stress, and are less likely to be absent or leave the organization (Peluchette & Karl, 2005). More recently companies have discovered the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, where workplace fun can enhance both (Karl & Peluchette, 2006). There is a growing body of literature and anecdotal evidence examining the link between workplace fun, employee satisfaction, and perceptions of quality of customer service; however, there is a lack of empirical research examining this link (Karl & Peluchette, 2006). Research has demonstrated that positive moods tend to generalize from whatever caused them to other stimuli in the temporal and social context (Forgas, Bower, & Krantz, 1984).

Beliefs about the job, as well as experiencing a pleasant mood at work, have both been found to make independent contributions to the prediction of job satisfaction (Ilies & Judge, 2004). There is also some support for increased employee job satisfaction based on the positive impact of workplace humor and fun. However, as with other psychological dimensions, individuals are likely to differ in their attitudes toward fun. Some employees may see the humor and fun as a welcome distraction from the everyday stress of the workplace, whereas others may respond cynically and with resistance (Peluchette & Karl, 2005). According to Aldag and Sherony (2001), whether one deems fun at work as appropriate may depend on early socialization experiences, work history, peer influences, and personality characteristics. These factors may also account for varying attitudes about the importance of fun at work. For individuals with high social needs, fun at work may help in initiating new relationships, which could play an important role in job satisfaction. Also, fun activities could be viewed by some as a way to increase productivity, but others may see these activities as creating chaos and more work for employees (Peluchette & Karl, 2005).

**Social Support and Workplace Fun Decrease Job Related Tension**

Mikhail (1981) presents a definition of stress that integrates both physiological and psychological components of stress. “Stress is the state which arises from an actual or perceived demand capacity imbalance in the organ’s vital adjustment actions and which is partially manifested by a nonspecific response.” This definition suggests that many specific indicators of stress may be present regardless of the source of the stress (Selye, 1976). Much of the organizational literature is focused on attitudinal indicators of stress like job satisfaction; however, other stressor categories include environmental/organizational/role characteristics (E/O/R), personal characteristics, and interpersonal relations (Frew & Bruning, 1987). Personal characteristics include needs, values, behavior patterns, self-esteem, etc. Interpersonal variables include measures of relationships that impact a person’s adjustment to the work environment, such as with supervisors or peers (Frew & Bruning, 1987).

Social support falls under the interpersonal variables category, in which relationships are evaluated and attribute to feelings of belonging and adjustment in the work environment. This study attempts to examine the relationship between social support in the workplace and reduced job stress as a result of these interpersonal relationships. There is little to no empirical research examining the effect of workplace fun on perceived work stress; however it does contribute to job satisfaction, which has been shown to reduce stress at work (Ilies & Judge, 2004).

**Methods**

In order to better understand the relationship between social support and workplace fun on work outcomes of motivation and job stress and quality of life outcomes of life stress and self worth, surveys will be distributed to different stores in the local outlet mall who have agreed to participate in the study.

*Participants*

The participants will be current employees of consenting retail stores in the Prime Outlet Mall in San Marcos, Texas. As most, but not all, employees consist of Texas State University, San Marcos students, they will be asked to report level of education completed, classification, and current enrollment status. Participant demographics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and rate of pay will be self-report measures to track group differences, and they will be asked to respond truthfully as they will be assured that the surveys will remain anonymous.

*Measures/Administration*

The participants will be asked to respond to questions on these scales: life stress, job-related tension, attitude toward fun at work, work satisfaction, self-esteem, and social support inventory. After receiving permission from each store manager to distribute the surveys, the employees will be asked to fill out a survey and return it to an envelope provided; after two weeks time the surveys will be collected. In order to reduce the time needed to transcribe the data for analysis, scantrons will be provided, and the participants will be asked to fill in their answers.

The life stress scale will help determine how much stress a person experiences from day to day, and the job-related tension scale can determine how much of that stress is related to one’s job (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). The attitudes toward fun at work scale along with the satisfaction scale enables the researcher to gain an understanding of how satisfied an employee is with his or her work and if employees feel motivated to do a good job. The self-esteem scale will be used to gain an understanding of the participants’ feelings of self-worth which will be correlated with their reports of stress and satisfaction to determine the quality of life factor of self-worth. The social support inventory scale measures perceived support from friends in the workplace, which can help reduce overall life stress.

*Planned Analyses*

Correlations will be computed to examine the relationships among the following variables: social support, workplace fun, job tension, job satisfaction, life stress, and self-worth. Multiple regression analyses will be conducted to determine if 1) social support, workplace fun, job tension, and job satisfaction predict life stress, and 2) if social support, workplace fun, job tension, and job satisfaction predict self-worth. These analyses will be conducted with SPSS. The goal of the study is to determine if these predictors can provide a statistically unique contribution to examining the role of work on life stress and self-worth, or if one factor is greater predictor than the other.